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"Race to the Top" Needs to Include Bureau of Indian Education Schools

Rep. McCollum introduces legislation to fix BIE school exclusion from "Race to the Top" funds so Native American children have access to critical education funding

Washington, DC - Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) today introduced bipartisan legislation to address the lack of Recovery Act funding reaching Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in Minnesota and across the country. The bill, with 16 bipartisan co-sponsors, would allocate a small percentage of the "Race to the Top" funds and the Innovation Fund for Native students at BIE schools.

"To create systemic change and find overdue solutions for problems that have long been ignored, we must make long-term investments in education. In no community are these issues faced - and subsequently ignored - more than with American Indians and Alaska Natives. I introduced this bill to address the extreme lack of funding that perpetuates adverse conditions and unmet basic needs in Indian Country. Not including BIE schools was an oversight, and we're trying to fix it. We must prevent the first Americans from becoming an invisible people in the eyes of the federal government," Congresswoman McCollum said.

"This bill is critical to providing the same opportunities for education funding for the close to fifty thousand students who attend the K-12 schools within the Bureau of Indian Education school system. The National Indian Education Association is very pleased to support this bill as it upholds the trust responsibility of the United States government to ensure equitable educational quality and access for all Indian students," said Patricia Whitefoot (Yakama/Diné), President of the National Indian Education Association.

"I am committed to meet our trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native people, including the education of our Native students in the four Bureau of Indian Education schools in Minnesota and the 183 schools nationwide," Congresswoman McCollum said.

Bureau of Indian Education schools face the same hardships, if not much greater, as public schools. Under Title 1 of No Child Left Behind, 1 percent of funding is allocated to the BIE and

to outlying territories, and the BIE schools traditionally receive 0.72 percent by transfer to the Department of Interior. However, tribal governments and BIE schools are ineligible to access the "Race to the Top" grants and the Innovation Fund under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. As a result, tribes and BIE schools are deprived of the same economic relief and incentives for better education as public schools, despite the desperate need in Indian Country.

The bill:

- Complies with the federal government's trust responsibility to provide for the education of Native students.
- Fulfills the goals of "Race to the Top" and the Innovation Fund by providing funds to improve low-performing schools and the students who need it the most.
- Provides direct access to this funding to tribes and Bureau of Indian Education schools, respecting tribal sovereignty.
- Allocates at least 1 percent of the remaining "Race to the Top" funds and the Innovation Fund to be transferred to the Department of Interior for Bureau of Indian Education schools.

Original co-sponsors of this bipartisan legislation include Rep. Kildee (D-MI) and Rep. Cole (R-OK), the co-chairs of the House Native American Caucus, and Reps. Peterson (D-MN), Oberstar (D-MN) and Walz (D-MN) of Minnesota. Additional original co-sponsors are: Rep. Bonner (R-AL), Rep. Baca (D-CA), Rep. Lujan (D-NM), Rep. Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Heinrich (D-NM), Rep. Shuler (D-NC), Rep. Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD), Rep. Kennedy (D-RI), Rep. Boren (D-OK) and Rep. Pallone (D-NJ).

The text of the legislation can be found [here](#) .

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees and is a member of the House Native American Caucus.

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